

# **AFRO** **BAROMETER**

**Afrobarometer Paper No.4**

**DEMOCRACY AND ECONOMY  
IN UGANDA:  
A Public Opinion Perspective**

by  
Michael Bratton,  
Gina Lambright,  
and Robert Sentamu

**A comparative series of national public  
attitude surveys on democracy, markets  
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**December 15, 2000**

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## INTRODUCTION

### Political and Economic Setting

During the last fourteen years, Uganda has once again attracted international attention, though this time for more positive reasons than the rampant chaos of the 1970s and early 1980s. In almost every respect, the country has traveled a long way since 1986, experiencing gains in political stability, economic growth, and gender equality.

The advent of relative peace has not erased the religious and ethnic conflicts of the past. But the policies of the National Resistance Movement, including a ban on political party activity, have significantly diminished the ability of politicians to make sectarian appeals. President Museveni has repeatedly criticized the role of multiparty politics in inciting conflict, preferring instead a broad-based, inclusive, “no-party” form of government, which he calls the “movement” system. Despite restrictions on freedom of association, the NRM government has cautiously opened up a measure of political space, best exemplified in a vocal opposition press.

Presidential and parliamentary elections were held in 1996 — and declared free and fair by international observers — which offered Ugandans a first opportunity to elect leaders since the flawed elections of 1980. A referendum was held in June 2000 to decide the future political system for the country in which voters were asked to choose between a continuation of the movement system or a return to multiparty politics. The formal results revealed that many Ugandans accept the political status quo and, for the moment, give credit to the movement system for the country’s stability. However, the low turnout of voters for the referendum (just over half of the eligible electorate) suggests that other citizens may be ready to embrace political change.

Moreover, despite advancement, Uganda’s violent past has not been laid entirely to rest. Populations in outlying regions continue to suffer from political insecurity born of rebel insurgencies. The political and economic effects of random attacks by the Lord’s Resistance Army in the north and the Allied Democratic Forces in the west threaten to unravel the stability achieved in the rest of the country and weaken the legitimacy of the NRM government.

In the economic arena, the government has remained committed since 1987 to a structural adjustment program based on World Bank and IMF recommendations. Reform efforts have focused on currency devaluation, liberalizing agricultural prices, and downsizing the public sector, among other policies. The economic benefits of the government’s strategy are evidenced by annual growth rates that have averaged 7.1 percent in the 1990s<sup>1</sup>, as well as a generous debt relief package (\$650 million) from the World Bank in 1998.

Yet growth has not trickled down evenly, leaving many Ugandans concerned about poverty and inequality. Moreover, instances of high-level corruption and extravagant defense expenditures (to respond to domestic unrest and to prosecute a war in the Congo) strain the public budget and, if continued, will likely impede future economic growth.

### Theme

The challenges of reform are twofold. The first is to promote broad-based popular *participation*, both in political decision-making and in the benefits of economic growth. Second, reform involves the replacement of existing monopolies of power and wealth with pluralistic regimes based on political and economic *competition*.

We present evidence to suggest that Uganda has achieved differential forms of success in the political and economic spheres. Politically, much more progress has been made in mobilizing mass participation than in institutionalizing political competition. Economically, the opposite holds true. Whereas there are few constraints on economic competition, many Ugandans feel that they have not participated in the economy's recent growth. Thus, though for different reasons, democratization and market reform in Uganda only partially complete.

## **Background to the Survey**

The purpose of the present study is to find out what ordinary Ugandans think about the political and economic status of their country. The results are based on a survey of a representative cross-section of 2271 adult Ugandans conducted between May 17 and June 21, 2000. Because every adult Ugandan had an equal chance of selection into the sample, the results depict the national population of Uganda as a whole.

The research instrument was a questionnaire containing 85 items that was administered face-to-face by teams of trained interviewers. The questions covered a diverse range of topics: from the respondents' social background to their self-defined identity; from their attitudes to democracy to their opinions on economic reform; and from citizens' involvement in voluntary associations to their voting behavior in past elections and the recent referendum.

In order to place Uganda in context, and to aid the interpretation of results, the questionnaire contained various items derived from surveys already conducted in several countries in West and Southern Africa. To aid comparison, the wording of such items was usually identical in each country. As a result, Uganda now forms part of an ongoing, twelve-country Afrobarometer project that tracks and contrasts public attitudes to democracy and economy across the continent.<sup>ii</sup>

The margin of sampling error for the reported results is plus or minus 2.5 percent.<sup>iii</sup> At the request of the funders, the survey was conducted in the late stages of campaign for the Referendum 2000. Because the heated political atmosphere at the time may have induced some citizens to provide socially or politically "correct" answers, the level of response error may be higher in this survey than in Afrobarometer surveys conducted in other countries under calmer circumstances. When using this report, therefore, readers should bear both sources of possible error in mind.

## **Demographics of the Sample**

As a representative sample, the survey population closely matches the distributions of subgroups within the national population in key respects such as gender, occupation, and religion (See Table 1). The survey also covers all four regions of Uganda (northern, eastern, central and western) in proportion their relative size in the national population, including 36 of the 45 official districts.<sup>iv</sup> The procedures of random selection of survey respondents produced a sample population that was slightly younger and more educated than indicated by Uganda's 1991 census, though demographic changes in the population itself since 1991 could well account for these minor discrepancies.

To adapt the questionnaire to local conditions, we translated the English version into nine local languages: Luganda, Luo, Rutooro, Lusoga, Rukiga, Lumasaba, Ateso, Runyoro and Lugbara. All interviews were administered in the language of the respondent's choice, including English.

<b>Figure 1: Demographics of the Sample</b> (figures are percentages of the total sample)			
<b>Number of Persons Interviewed</b>	<b>N = 2271</b>	<b>Languages</b>	
<b>Male: Female ratio</b>	<b>50:50</b>	Luganda	22
<b>Median Age</b>	<b>30 years</b>	Luo	14
<b>Urban: Rural Distribution</b>	<b>15:85</b>	Rutooro	12
		Lusoga	10
		Rukiga	7
<b>Education</b>	13	Lumasaba	6
No schooling	42	Ateso	5
Primary only	33	Runyoro	4
Secondary only	12	Lugbara	3
Post-secondary			
		<b>Income</b>	
<b>Occupation</b>	44	None	24
Farmer/fisher	10	Less than 10,000 U.shs.	23
Businessperson	9	10,001 - 30,000 U.shs.	20
Homemaker	6	30,001 - 70,000 U.shs.	21
Unemployed	6	Over 70,001 shs.	13
Student	4		
Informal marketeer		<b>Region</b> (weighted)	
		North	18
<b>Religion</b>	46	East	26
Protestant	38	Central	29
Catholic	13	West	27
Muslim			

In the analysis that follows, we consider the effects of numerous demographic factors. Where subgroups of the population do not meaningfully influence public attitudes or behaviors, we maintain the discussion at a summary, national level. If we find variations, however, especially between men and women, then we highlight them.<sup>v</sup> The final section of the paper seeks to explain gender gaps.

## DEMOCRACY

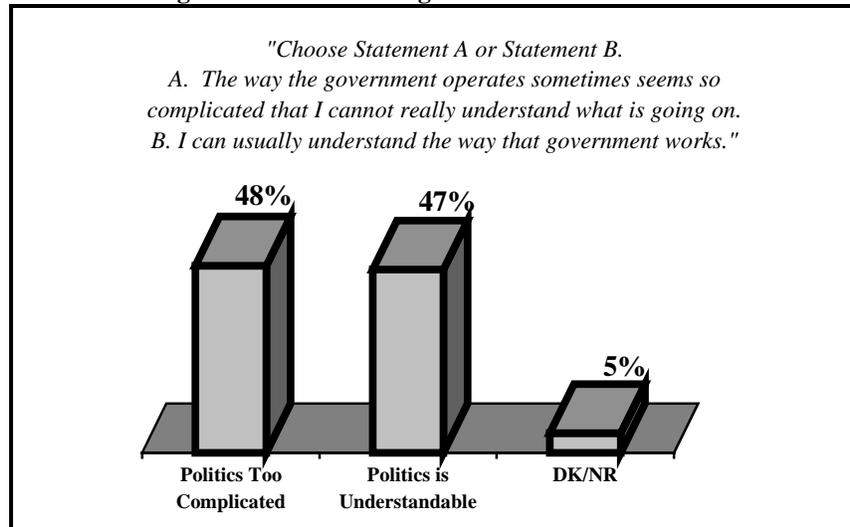
Democracy is a tricky subject in Uganda because of the enigmatic nature of the existing political regime. Has the National Resistance Movement created a novel form of popular democracy that is competitive and responsive? Or is it an authoritarian one-party state in disguise? Alternatively could the “movement” be a partial, hybrid political regime that is democratic in some sectors (e.g. a free press) but undemocratic in others (e.g. the party system)?

### Interest in Politics

Uganda has a participant political culture. Most survey respondents declared themselves “interested” in politics and government (83 percent, of which 45 percent were “very interested”). The 15 percent minority who said they were “not interested” was far smaller than the one-third of Nigerians and Ghanaians who expressed this kind of detachment. Remember, however, that the survey in Uganda was conducted during a referendum campaign when political sensibilities were at a peak.

Men express more interest in politics than women, not only because they report significantly greater access to all types of news media, but especially because they are twice as likely to engage in daily political discussions with others (32 percent for men, 16 percent for women).

**Figure 2. Understanding Government and Politics**



Exposure to political information does not necessarily lead to a sense of citizen self-confidence. Ugandans are split on the question of whether public affairs are “too complicated to understand” (48 percent) or “usually understandable” (47 percent). Even though many survey respondents find politics hard to fathom, a majority nonetheless feel competent enough to get involved. Six out of ten think that they can influence the opinions of others and eight out of ten think that they can use their vote to choose leaders who will make the future better.

Although these levels of subjective citizen competence may seem high, Uganda is on a par with other countries like Zambia, Ghana and Nigeria. Greater variations in political competence occur within the country. For example, men are significantly more likely than women to say that they can influence the political opinions of other people (72 percent versus 54 percent). And educated people and residents of the western Uganda also express a stronger sense of political efficacy than do fellow citizens.

### **Political Participation**

To what extent, then, have Ugandans become actively engaged in public life? There are many forms of political participation. In addition to informal activities like discussing politics with others, this report refers to several other dimensions: electoral participation (e.g. voting), inter-electoral representation (e.g. contacting leaders), and community-based participation (e.g. attending meetings and rallies). At this time we present an overall national profile of political participation, reserving analysis of any gender gaps for the last section of the report.

Electoral participation in the referendum has been summarized above. We simply add that, like people everywhere, Ugandans consistently claim high rates of voter turnout (for example, 80 percent in the 1996 Presidential election), usually higher than official turnout figures (in this case 73 percent).

Between elections, citizens participate by interacting with selected leaders (see Figure 3). We asked: “In the last five years, how often have you contacted any of the following persons for help to solve a problem?”. People most frequently seek help from officials of Local Councils (62 percent, 17 percent

“often”), in large part because the council structure is based at the village level and is accessible. The council hierarchy is often dominated by NRM adherents though, in some places, the composition of councils is politically plural.

At the same time, citizens frequently approach religious leaders (59 percent) and rely heavily on private patrons (41 percent). Similarly, when seeking a solution to a problem, people turn equally to traditional rulers as to government officials (both 23 percent). They are least likely to make contact with Members of Parliament. We conclude that informal political networks are just as important for political participation as formal organizational channels and that citizens are more likely to link with central government through council and movement hierarchies than through parliamentary representatives.

**Figure 3. Inter-Electoral Representation** (percentage citing at least one contact with a leader)

<i>“In the last five years, how often have you contacted any of the following persons for help to</i>			
Local Council official	62	Government official	23
Religious leader	59	Traditional ruler	23
Other influential person	41	Member of Parliament	16

If a local government system has begun to take root, one would expect to find extensive community-based participation. This is what survey respondents declare in Uganda (see Table 6). More than eight out of ten persons report attending a community meeting during the last five years. Almost two-thirds say they have attended a civic education meeting, though it is not clear what respondents mean by this. Since attendance at a civic education meeting correlates closely with attendance at an election rally, one wonders again whether respondents are referring to partisan “political” education or to non-partisan “civic” education.

There is no gainsaying the fact that Ugandans engage in community-based politics more frequently than citizens of other African countries: in Zambia in 1996, for example, 66 percent said they had attended a community meeting (versus 81 percent in Uganda) and just 14 percent said they had actively promoted a candidate for office (versus a hard-to-believe 43 percent in Uganda).

**Figure 4. Community-Based Participation** (percentage citing at least one instance)

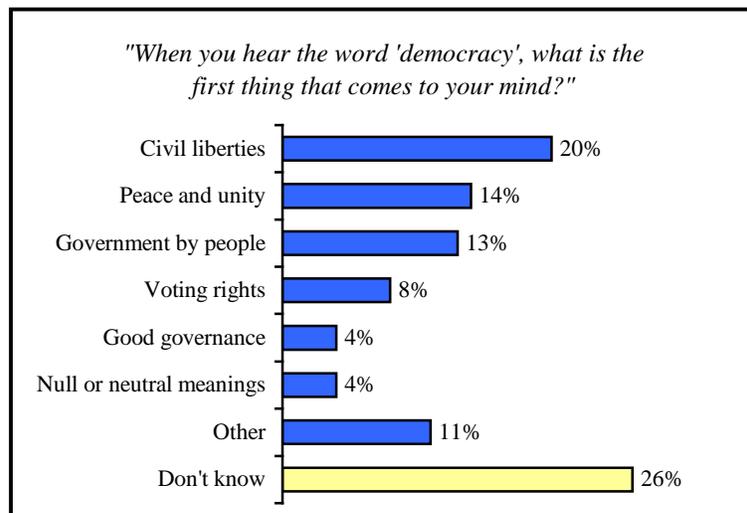
<i>“I will read out a list of things that people sometimes do as citizens. Please tell me how often you personally have done any of these things in the last five years?”</i>			
Attend community	81	Attend election rally	65
Attend civic education	66	Work for candidate	43

But what is the quality of this participation? Is it “autonomous,” being based on open political competition and voluntary individual choice, or is it “mobilized,” responding to the social pressures of a mass movement? Although we cannot settle this issue here, we lean towards the latter interpretation. To check for social pressures, recall that we asked people whether they expected “negative consequences for you personally if you fail to vote a certain way in the referendum”. Those who felt pressured said that they were more likely to vote for the movement system than for a multiparty regime. In addition, this group also said that they were more likely to attend community meetings and election rallies. Thus, at least some Ugandans are participating in politics because they feel that they are expected, even required, to do so.

## Understandings of Democracy

A good starting point for any discussion of democracy is to define terms. Accordingly, the survey inquired: “When you hear the word ‘democracy’, what is the first thing that comes to your mind?” The question was posed in a local language but the word “democracy” was stated in English. In order to avoid influencing respondents, answers were solicited in open-ended form, that is, without predetermined response categories. Thus the survey participants could say whatever they liked and we recorded their responses verbatim.

As Figure 5 shows, the most common response is that the concept has no popular meaning. One-quarter of all Ugandans (26 percent) say that they “don’t know” what democracy means, perhaps because the popular political discourse in Uganda has focused mainly on political stability. Indeed, more citizens are unaware of the term “democracy” in Uganda than in six other African countries where this question was asked in 1999-2000 (and where an average 17 percent said “don’t know”). Ugandans more closely resemble the citizens of Namibia (29 percent of whom say “don’t know”) than those of Botswana (8 percent) or Nigeria (6 percent).



**Figure 5. Popular Understandings of Democracy**

Within Uganda, awareness of democracy varies across various social groups. Women are more than twice as likely as men to say that they don’t know what democracy means (40 percent versus 17 percent). A gap in awareness also exists between urban and rural dwellers (31 percent versus 16 percent). Education is the best predictor, with the spread between people with secondary schooling and those with primary schooling being the widest of all (42 percent versus 12 percent). Interestingly, lower levels of female awareness of democracy are not due to the fact that girls receive less education than boys; a significant gender gap in awareness exists regardless of level of education.

What, then, does democracy mean to those Ugandans who know about the concept? Contrary to arguments that Africans have specific cultural interpretations of democracy, Ugandans express rather liberal and universal views. In order of importance, democracy means civil liberties like freedom of speech (20 percent), government by the people between elections (13 percent), voting rights at election time (8 percent), and open and accountable decision-making: in short, good governance (4 percent). The rank order of these values in Uganda – civil liberties, followed by popular government and voting rights – is exactly the same as in six other African countries for which survey results are available.<sup>vi</sup>

Ugandans stand apart from other Africans, however, in the extent to which they associate democracy with social peace and national unity. These are important values in other African countries, being the sixth most frequently cited interpretation of democracy elsewhere and accounting for 6 percent of all responses. But, in Uganda, peace and unity ranks third overall and accounts for 14 percent of all responses. Thus democracy for Ugandans means more than a set of procedures for guaranteeing rights and electing responsive governments. It has an added substantive meaning: democracy is a system of government that puts an end to political violence and unites and stabilizes the country.

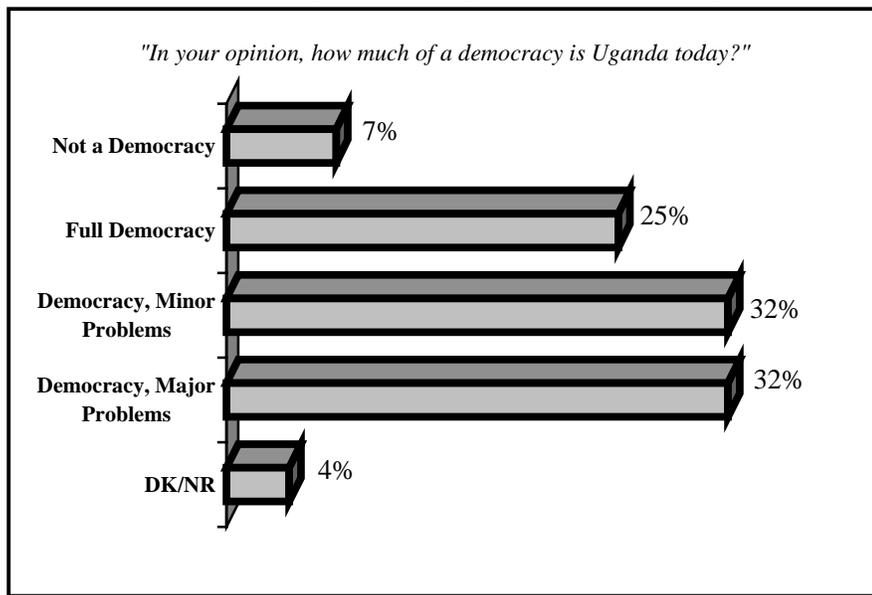
Since the end of the Cold War, democracy has become a broadly valued political symbol around the world. Citizens therefore tend to project onto it the value that they most desire: Eastern Europeans see it in terms of personal freedoms (e.g. to speak their minds and to travel), South Africans in term of jobs and housing. We show later in this paper that Ugandans cite political security as the country's most elusive and pressing goal. Thus, they portray "democracy", however fully or partially understood, as a means for banishing the violent conflicts that have marred the country's recent past.

Before closing this discussion, a couple of short observations are in order about what democracy does *not* mean in Uganda. Again contrary to conventional wisdom, only a few Ugandans associate democracy with substantive outcomes like economic development (3 percent) and social justice (2 percent). Importantly, few Ugandans make a connection between democracy and multiparty competition (2 percent). In other words, rather than stressing political competition, they place more emphasis on political participation (e.g. "government by the people"). This finding opens up the possibility that Ugandans consider that democracy is possible even in the absence of multiple competing political parties, a subject that we now address.

### **Is Uganda a democracy?**

Without doubt, Ugandans consider the existing political regime in their country to be a democracy. Asked directly "how much of a democracy is Uganda today?", only 7 percent say that it is not a democracy at all (see Figure 5). By the same token, only 25 percent are willing to venture that it is a "full" democracy, compared to the 34 percent in Malawi and 46 percent in Botswana who think that their own democratic regimes are completely consolidated. Almost two-thirds of Ugandans consider their democracy to have "major" (32 percent) or "minor" (32 percent) shortcomings.

**Figure 6. Is Uganda a Democracy?**



Hefty regional differences were observed on this question. Whereas northerners were most likely to say that Uganda was “not a democracy” (24 percent), easterners and westerners were most inclined to hold the opinion that Uganda had attained “full democracy” (33 and 30 percent respectively). Gender differences were less obvious, though men were somewhat more critical of present political arrangements than women.

### **Regime Support and Satisfaction**

The fact that Ugandans think that their present political regime is a democracy helps to explain why they support democracy as their preferred form of government (80 percent), and are satisfied with the way it actually works in practice in their country (72 percent). These levels of support and satisfaction are high by African standards, coming close to those found in Botswana and Nigeria, which currently lead the continent.

But results from standard survey items require extra interpretation in the Ugandan context. More so than in more open African countries, questions about political support and satisfaction seem to tap attitudes to the existing (“movement”) regime rather than to “democracy” understood as a form of government based on competitive, multiparty elections. This inference is supported by the extremely high correlation among survey respondents who think that Uganda is a democracy and those who are satisfied with the way that the present regime works.<sup>vii</sup> As such, respondents may be expressing support and satisfaction for a familiar system, which itself may be an incomplete version of democracy.

Having said that, we do find evidence of popular commitment to basic democratic values, universally defined. Clear majorities of survey respondents asserted that it was “very important” to them that the government of Uganda protect the following rights: the freedom to criticize the government (71 percent), the rights of minority groups (65 percent), and the freedom to choose one’s own religion (59 percent). These respondents apparently find no contradiction between their support for such core democratic values and their support for “democracy” in its Ugandan form. *Ergo*, they must believe that the movement system delivers these valued political goods.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE STATE

One might argue that mobilized participation would block the emergence of an autonomous civil society. Yet the outlines of a civil society can be found in the Ugandan survey data. This section explores the political identities and associational memberships that Ugandans have adopted. After summarizing these and other features of civil society, we examine the attitudes of citizens to the state. Do they think that public institutions are trustworthy, responsive, and legitimate?

### Political Identity and Interpersonal Trust

When we asked, “besides being Ugandan, which specific group do you feel you belong to first and foremost?” the results were surprising. Given the nature of past political conflicts in the country, one might expect Ugandans to identify themselves in ethnic or regional terms. For example, 48 percent of Nigerians do so. On the contrary, most Ugandans (63 percent) chose an occupational identity, for example a farmer, a student or a businessperson. Only 13 percent chose an ethnic or regional label and just 8 percent a religious identity (versus 21 percent who cited their religion in Nigeria). And only 6 percent identified themselves in gender terms, though women did this twice as often as men.

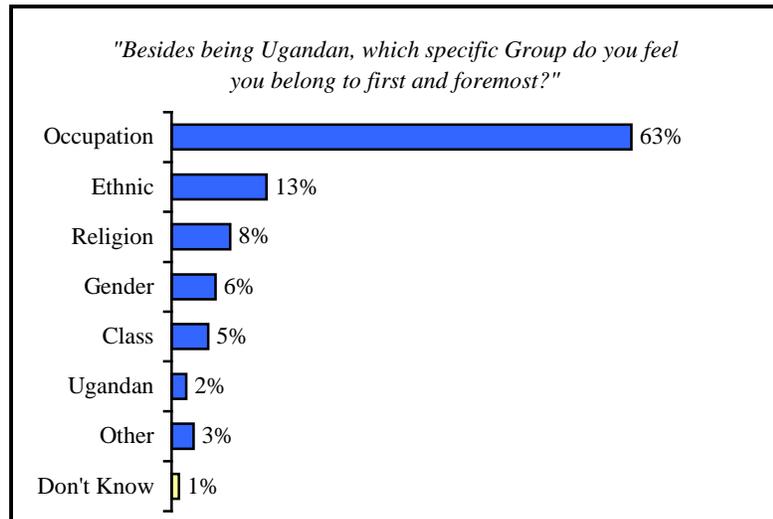


Figure 7. Political Identity

Various explanations are possible for Uganda’s distinctive pattern of political identities. Given the NRM’s efforts to promote pan-ethnic politics, respondents may have felt that it was socially or politically unacceptable to admit to ethnic pride. Alternatively, the survey interviewers may have inadvertently prompted an occupational answer. Most likely, however, Ugandans really do define their political identities primarily in terms of the work they do, which itself may be a reflection of the country’s relatively well-developed educational and market systems.

Whatever identity people ascribe to themselves, Ugandans do not harbor a sense of grievance that their self-defined group is treated unfairly by the government. Overall only 18 percent feel that the state discriminates against their group “always” or “to a large extent”; on the contrary, 42 percent say that official discrimination “never” occurs or “hardly at all”. Interestingly, political exclusion is most likely to be felt by those who define their identities in regional terms, and in Uganda these people commonly are northerners. Interestingly too, people who express a gender identity are likely to say that the government “never” treats their group unfairly, probably reflecting a public appreciation of the NRM’s reforms to advance the status of women.

Do Ugandans expect fair treatment from their fellow citizens? We asked the standard questionnaire item that has been used in values surveys around the world: “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you must be very careful in dealing with people?”

The results revealed a good deal of public wariness, with only 16 percent of Ugandans finding their fellow citizens generally trustworthy and 82 percent expressing caution. In this case, Uganda resembles Nigeria (where only 15 percent express trust), but falls well short of Namibia and Malawi (where 32 and 44 percent express trust). The combination of occupational identities and low levels of interpersonal trust in Uganda suggests a society that is relatively individualistic by African standards.

These findings are partly offset by the 80 percent of respondents who say that they trust members of their own ethnic group “somewhat” or “a lot”. Significantly fewer people trust members of other ethnic groups (66 percent), which implies the persistence of at least some ethnic consciousness. All types of interpersonal and intergroup distrust increase with education and urban residence. And people from the central region are particularly distrusting of members of their own ethnic groups.

### Associational Life

Perhaps voluntary associations help link together individuals in Uganda. The survey found quite a high density of associational life (see Figure 8). The most widespread forms of association are churches, mosques or other religious communities, to which 80 percent claim to belong. Almost half of all Ugandans say they are active in their religious groups (48 percent) and 9 percent claim to hold church leadership positions.

**Figure 8. Membership in Voluntary Associations** (percentage of sample)

Religious organization	80	Women’s organization	26
Sport or recreation club	32	Professional/business	22
Development association	30	Environmental group	18
Trade union/Farmer	30	Democracy/human rights	15
Educational association	29	Charitable organization	13

Regardless of expressed identities, therefore, voluntary associations in Uganda form mainly along religious rather than occupational lines. In terms of frequency of membership, occupational groups like trade unions and farmer associations rank third and professional or business associations rank seventh. Even so, Ugandans organize around occupation much more commonly than other Africans. Despite the apparent importance of trade unions and farmers associations in Zambia, just 2 percent of Zambians claim union or cooperative membership (versus 30 percent in Uganda). And, even though Nigeria is known for its business and professional associations, only 6 percent of Nigerians say they belong (versus 22 percent in Uganda).

Ugandans are apparently keen on sports, with 32 percent belonging to a football or other kind of recreational club, including drinking clubs for men. Almost as many respondents claim affiliation with a development association, including savings clubs for women. Pro-democracy or human rights groups attract few adherents, at least by local standards. And, regrettably, participants in organizations devoted to democracy promotion report the lowest levels of “active membership” and “official leadership” of any type of association.

As might be expected, men and women join different sorts of groups. While both genders attend churches in approximately the same proportions, males are more likely to join occupational associations (34 percent) and females to join women's organizations (41 percent). We did however find a handful of men who claimed to be active members, even leaders, of women's groups.

Educated people are more likely to belong to, and to lead, professional bodies, parent-teacher associations, and human rights groups. Importantly, while women's organizations are often led by middle-class women, education or income are not requisites for membership of these groups.

Associational life seems to have positive effects on the availability of social capital in civil society. For example, members of occupational associations are more likely to think that humanity is generally trustworthy. Churchgoers are more likely to have confidence in persons with ethnic backgrounds different to their own. And, although the effects are slight, membership in women's groups seems to boost both interpersonal and inter-ethnic trust.<sup>viii</sup>

### Political Representation

We now shift focus from civil society to the state. How satisfied are citizens with the performance of their political representatives? One is immediately struck that Ugandans feel unusually competent about being able to "make our representatives listen to our problems": 62 percent feel that they can demand attention from elected leaders compared to 51 percent in Ghana and only 34 percent in Zambia.

Much depends, however, on which leader's performance is being evaluated (see Figure 15). President Museveni received an overwhelmingly positive job performance rating (93 percent) from survey respondents in June 2000. People also endorse the performance of other leaders, though less wholeheartedly. At the district level, locally elected LC5 representatives score higher than centrally appointed Resident District Commissioners (RDCs).

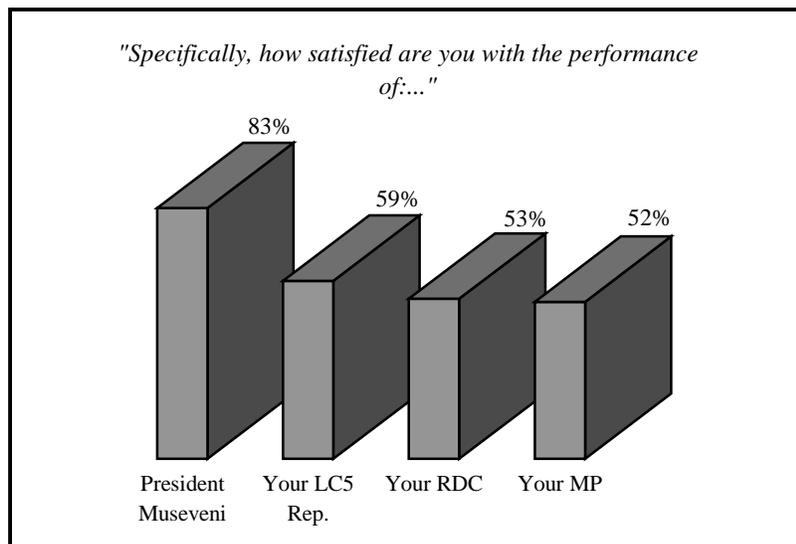


Figure 9. Evaluation of Performance of Leaders (% 'Satisfied')

Members of Parliament were seen as least effective (52 percent). As in other African countries, many citizens complain that M.P.s neglect their constituencies, visiting only when elections roll around. While disaffection with parliamentary representation has not reached Zambian proportions (where only 25 percent approve of M.P. performance), it cannot increase much further in Uganda without becoming a majority complaint.

## Perceptions of Corruption

As of mid-2000, however, Ugandans seem ready to give their political leaders the benefit of the doubt. A clear majority (59 percent) agree that “politicians and civil servants are trying their best to look after the interests of people like me”. Surveys elsewhere show that most Africans disagree with this statement. Apart from affirming an identity of interests, sentiments of solidarity with leaders may have a darker side in which clients are saying that they think they can obtain undue advantage by manipulating ties to patrons. As evidence, an even larger majority (72 percent) consider that “the best way to get ahead in this life is to have contacts with important people in high places”.

Moreover, government in Uganda is not perceived as free of corruption. Again, perceptions of corruption vary by type of leader or department of government (see Table 13). Three quarters of Ugandans (76 percent) think that corruption is “fairly common” or “very common” in the police force. And more than three out of five Ugandans (over 60 percent) say the same about other agents of the executive branch, with legislative leaders faring almost as badly. And one half of Ugandans see corruption in the judiciary.

Indeed, government is seen as more corrupt than the private sector. And, within the private sector, public opinion indicts Ugandan businesses more frequently than foreign businesses. Teachers get off rather lightly, but the fact that almost one-quarter see them as participating in corruption (e.g. when some school officials insist on fee payments for free educational services, for example in primary schools) is a worrying sign for the integrity of education in Uganda. Women’s organizations and churches receive a relatively clean bill of health. Yet leaders of women’s groups, who presumably are in a position to know, are more likely to say that financial and other abuses occur in their organizations too.

**Figure 10. Perceptions of Corruption (% Saying Corruption ‘Common’)**

<i>“Please tell me how common you think corruption is within each of the following groups or organizations.”</i>			
Police	76	Ugandan businessmen	44
Civil servants	64	Foreign businessmen	30
Customs agents	61	Teachers	22
Elected leaders	59	Women’s organizations	17
Judges	52	Churches	17

The above figures should be taken viewed with caution. It is worth remembering that, in other African countries, corruption is generally more often perceived than actually experienced. We were unable to squeeze questions on the actual frequency of bribery or gift-giving onto the questionnaire. But we suspect that reported levels of perceived corruption in Uganda are based in part on hearsay and rumor, just as they are everywhere else. Perhaps the most balanced judgment is provided by the 51 percent of Ugandans who disagree (and the 42 percent who agree) with the statement that “corruption is a fact of life in Uganda today; there is little that anyone can do about it”.

## Trust in Public Institutions

Attitudes to corruption shape trust in public institutions. And, in countries like Uganda where political relationships are highly personal, opinions about individual leaders also color how people view political organizations as a whole. Taken together, these factors give rise to a (by now) predictable pattern of trust in public institutions (see Table 14).

The NRM tops the list as the body that most Ugandans find trustworthy. At the other end of the scale, few people have confidence in political parties. Trust in one or other of these “polarizing” institutions is an excellent predictor of an individual’s intended vote in the June 2000 referendum and whether he or she is willing to countenance political party competition in Uganda at some time in the future.

**Figure 11. Trust in Public Institutions** (percentage expressing “trust”)



New findings include the following. Women’s organizations are highly trusted, in major part because they are seen as free of corruption. The Electoral Commission is also trusted, in this case because many Ugandans regard the administration of the 1996 presidential and parliamentary elections to have been above board. Along with the law courts, the Uganda Joint Christian Council (which played a coordinating role in civic education and vote monitoring campaigns for the referendum) receives a slightly lower trust rating. This is partly because many people do not recognize the name of the UJCC or know what it does. Oddly, considering their reputation as the most corrupt agency of government, the police manage (barely) to win trust from a majority of Ugandans.

One would not expect trust in public institutions to be uniform across all regions or social groups. This is indeed the case. Northerners are unusually distrustful of the NRM, though a majority (75 percent) in this region is still trustful. People from the central region, in this case a majority (53 percent), are most likely to distrust the police. And westerners are especially likely to condemn political parties, often vehemently (76 percent distrust, 67 percent “strongly”).

As for gender, men are generally more skeptical than women; they are therefore more likely to express suspicion about *all* political institutions, including *both* the NRM *and* political parties. Because women are less well-informed politically than men, they are more likely to say that they “don’t know” whether the Electoral Commission is trustworthy. Finally, it comes as no surprise that women’s organizations elicit more trust from women than from men.

## **The Legitimacy of the State**

If citizens regard the institutions of the state as trustworthy, they will tend to voluntarily comply with official decisions. The survey used several questions to test whether Ugandans think that the state is legitimate and whether they respect the rule of law.

On one hand, there is no doubt that Ugandans want their governments to be legally incorporated and constitutionally governed. An overwhelming majority (91 percent, 66 percent “strongly”) reject the proposition that “the army should come in to govern the country”. Vetoes of military rule were particularly frequent among middle-aged and older persons who were old enough to remember the offenses of the Amin and Okello administrations of the 1970s and early 1980s. To determine if the present 1996 national constitution is seen as legitimate, we asked whether it embodies “the values and aspirations of the Ugandan people”. A strong majority (75 percent) readily agreed with this “easy” question, though it is worth noting that 17 percent “didn’t know” either what a constitution was, or whether the Ugandan one was legitimate.

On the other hand, respondents were much more equivocal when asked whether “it is acceptable to bend the law, as long as one does not break it”. Whereas 52 percent disagreed, 39 percent agreed. And respondents were split right down the middle on the toughest standard of state legitimacy: does “our government have the right to make decisions that all people have to abide by, whether or not they agree with them?”. One half agreed (49 percent) and the other half either disagreed (42 percent) or “didn’t know”. Thus, because a significant proportion of the population extends only conditional compliance to the state, we must conclude that the rule of law remains seriously incomplete in Uganda.

Willingness to comply with the law of the land varies along familiar lines. Men are somewhat more likely than women to question the state’s authority (46 percent versus 38 percent). And northerners are very much more likely than westerners to say they would withhold compliance if they disagreed with a public decision (49 percent -- almost a majority -- versus 35 percent).

The best predictor of state legitimacy, however, is partisan preference. A majority (60 percent) of those who intended to vote for the movement system in the referendum said that government decisions should always be obeyed, whether or not citizens agreed. By contrast, a majority (57 percent) of those who intended to vote for the multiparty option in the referendum said that citizens should reserve the right to resist public commands with which they disagree. Thus, at least for multiparty supporters, the referendum of June 2000 did not resolve the basic controversy about whether the present holders of state power actually have the right to rule.

## **THE ECONOMY**

There are many ways to create political legitimacy. For regimes that are less than completely democratic, economic performance is a tried and true method for winning popular compliance and support. This section of the report reviews the economic values, preferences and evaluations of a representative cross-section of Ugandans as revealed by the June 2000 survey.

### **Economic Satisfaction**

Ugandans seem to be relatively content with the economic conditions prevailing in their country. Clear majorities say they are satisfied with their own current living standards (57 percent), the state of the national economy (62 percent), and “the general situation in the country today” (82 percent). In these ways, Ugandans resemble Nigerians, 58 percent of whom expressed satisfaction with their own living standards in a parallel survey in early 2000. They also look like Namibians, two-thirds of whom said they

were satisfied with the condition of their national economy in late 1999. But, in this regard, Ugandans differ dramatically from citizens in most African countries -- for example, Botswana (47 percent), Ghana (34 percent) and Zimbabwe (6 percent) – where satisfaction with the national economy is a minority sentiment.<sup>ix</sup>

Many Ugandans feel positive about their current economic situation because it compares favorably with the country's economic past. When asked to weigh living conditions today against those five years ago, survey respondents were twice as likely to be more satisfied now (54 percent, versus 27 percent who felt less satisfied). This seems to point to the trickling down to the mass level of at least some economic growth. The majority of Ugandans who report recent personal economic gains stands in stark contrast to the minorities who report such gains in other African countries: only 39 percent in Ghana, 26 percent in Malawi and, especially, just 3 percent in Zimbabwe.

Which segments of society are most satisfied? The survey revealed no gender or urban-rural differences in evaluations of economic conditions (whether personal or national, past or present). Instead, age and income had consistently strong effects.<sup>x</sup> For example, younger people (aged 25 years and below) were significantly more likely to be satisfied with current economic conditions than middle-aged and older persons (over 36 years old). And 69 percent of persons earning over 90,000 Ushs. (about US\$60) per month saw improvements in their personal economic conditions over the past five years, compared with 45 percent of persons earning less than 10,000 Ushs (about US\$7).

Rosy economic assessments are partly offset, however, by some countervailing evidence.

First, economic satisfaction is lukewarm in Uganda. Whether referring to personal or national economic conditions, or to the “general situation in the country”, people who are “somewhat” satisfied greatly outnumber (by at least three to one) those who are “very” satisfied.

Second, Ugandans are uncertain about what the economic future holds. The survey asked: “When you look forward at your life's prospects, how satisfied do you expect to be in one year's time?”. While only 13 percent said “less satisfied”, fully one quarter (26 percent) expected no change, and more than a third (35 percent) said “don't know”, the highest proportion found so far across eight African countries. Thus, although many Ugandans expect to be more satisfied with their lives in one year's time (39 percent), they are significantly less optimistic about the future than Ghanaians (52 percent), Namibians (57 percent), and, especially Nigerians (87 percent).

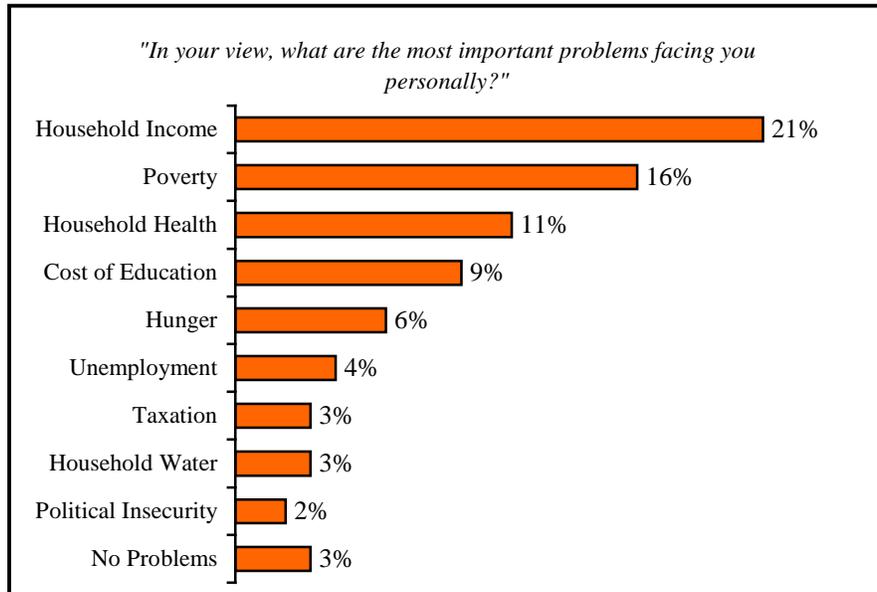
Third, Ugandan women are markedly less likely than Ugandan men to express economic optimism. Not only do more women say that they “don't know” what the future holds, but barely one-third of women (34 percent, versus 42 percent for men) think that their lives will get better anytime soon.

### **Personal and National Problems**

Economic concerns predominated when we asked, “in your view, what are the most important problems facing (a) you personally? and (b) the country?” The question was open-ended, allowing respondents to offer multiple responses and to say whatever they wished.<sup>xi</sup> The results can be thought of as a “people's agenda” for personal and national development.

As indicated in Figure 18, Ugandans mentioned four economic issues among their top ten personal concerns. Heading the list were shortfalls in household income, identified 21 percent of the time. Together, the economic items (household income, the cost of education, unemployment and over-taxation) amounted to 37 percent of all problems mentioned. Next came problems that had both economic and social dimensions (like poverty and hunger), which together accounted for 22 percent of all

responses. The prevalence of popular concerns about poverty, hunger and purchasing power indicates that, even in the midst of national economic recovery, more than a few Ugandans think that a growing economy has left them behind.



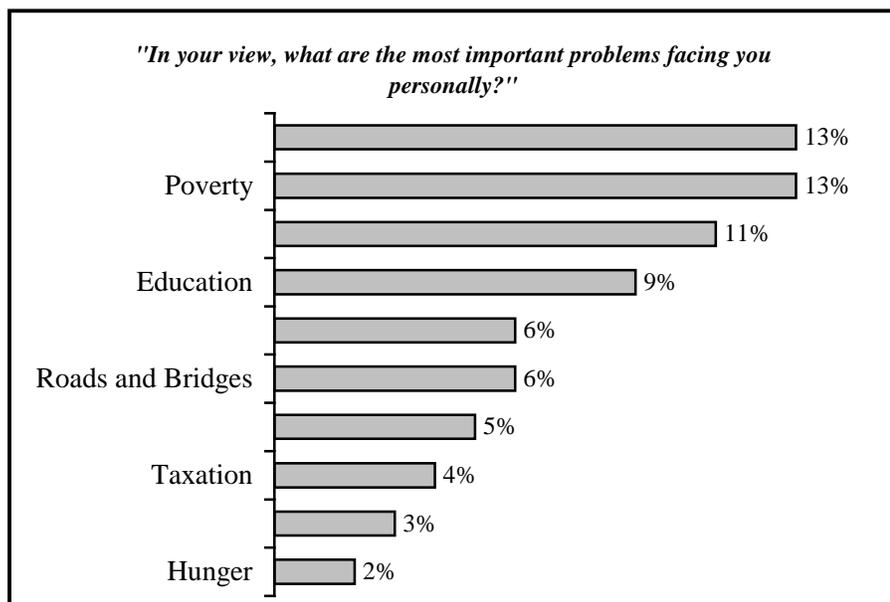
**Figure 12. Perceptions of Personal Problems** (as % of total problems cited)

Purely social problems (illness among household members, unreliable water supply) were mentioned by a smaller proportion (14 percent), though health concerns ranked third overall (among 11 percent of respondents). In a related finding, fully six out of ten Ugandans reported that their daily routine was inhibited “a lot” by “feeling tired, stressed or sick”. Not only were women more likely than men to say that they felt physically run down, but females were also twice as likely to voluntarily cite family health as an issue of personal concern.

Only three percent of Ugandans claimed to have no personal problems. And only one political issue made the top ten list, in this case, political insecurity (2 percent). Mirroring the geographical locations of opposition insurgencies, political violence caused more personal expressions of concern in the north and the west than in central Uganda.

The picture changes at the macro-level. Political insecurity is named as the top priority among national problems requiring government attention. Figure 19 indicates that Ugandans are equally concerned about the prevalence of poverty (13 percent) but, for two reasons, political insecurity edged ahead: it was cited by more people (a fact masked by rounding of percentage figures) and it was usually the first national problem that respondents raised (reserving poverty as their second-mentioned problem). Thus, before anything else, Ugandans want the state to provide political order.

**Figure 13. Perceptions of National Problems** (as % of total problems cited)



Otherwise, the rankings of problems on the personal and national development agendas are similar. In order of next importance, Ugandans desire poverty alleviation, health care for their families, and education for their children. As before, the cost of education is mentioned as a more pressing issue than the quality or availability of schools. But people expressed more concern with the low quality of health care services than they did with the cost of medicines or availability of clinics.

The infrastructure for development, like water supplies and roads and bridges, also figures prominently on the popular national agenda. For water supplies, the problem is seen primarily as one of availability of basic facilities like dams, wells, and reticulation systems; for roads and bridges, people mention both the need for new construction as well as the necessity to maintain the country's existing network.

Interesting regional variations were apparent in developmental priorities. Northerners were very much more likely than people from central Uganda to cite political insecurity (42 percent versus 11 percent). Easterners were most likely to put poverty at the top of their list (24 percent versus 11 percent for other Ugandans). And, whereas northerners complained about the quality of roads, westerners were more likely point to a lack of water. Gender differences were less marked, though men were more likely to grieve about taxation and women about poverty.

Just as interesting as the problems that people articulated are the items they did not raise. We were surprised to find very few concerns expressed about the war in the Congo, domestic violence, and AIDS (all less than 1 percent). Either these topics are considered taboo, or they do not figure as prominently in the popular imagination as they do in the preoccupations of professionals and journalists.

### **Basic Economic Values**

Where do Ugandans stand in the great economic debate of our time about state versus market? The survey reveals great ambiguity, perhaps even contradiction, on basic economic values.

On one hand, we discovered a sturdy culture of "statism". Some 61 percent of Ugandans agree (47 percent "strongly") that "the government should bear the main responsibility for ensuring the well-being

of people.” This contrasts with the 35 percent who think that “people should look after themselves and be responsible for their own success in life”. Indeed, Ugandans profess more “statism” than Africans in any other country where this question has been asked. Reliance on government for public well-being ranges elsewhere from a high of 59 percent in Zimbabwe to a low of 25 percent in Malawi.

On the other hand, Ugandans are not convinced that the public sector should be the country’s main employer. Only four out of ten respondents (40 percent) agree that “the government should provide employment for everyone who wants to work.” Instead, they tend to support the view that “the best way to create jobs is to encourage people to start their own businesses” (56 percent, 37 percent “strongly”). In this regard, public opinion in Uganda aligns more closely to popular views in other African countries, especially Ghana (57 percent), where majorities think that job creation is a task for entrepreneurs rather than for government.

Ugandans hold even stronger market values with regard to income distribution. More than seven out of ten respondents (73 percent, 54 percent “strongly”) think that “everyone should be free to earn as much as they can, even if this leads to differences in income among people”. Many fewer people (21 percent) say that “the government should place limits on how much the rich can earn, even if this discourages some people from working hard.” Remarkably, the Ugandan sample is more market-oriented on this question than any other national sample of Africans surveyed so far.

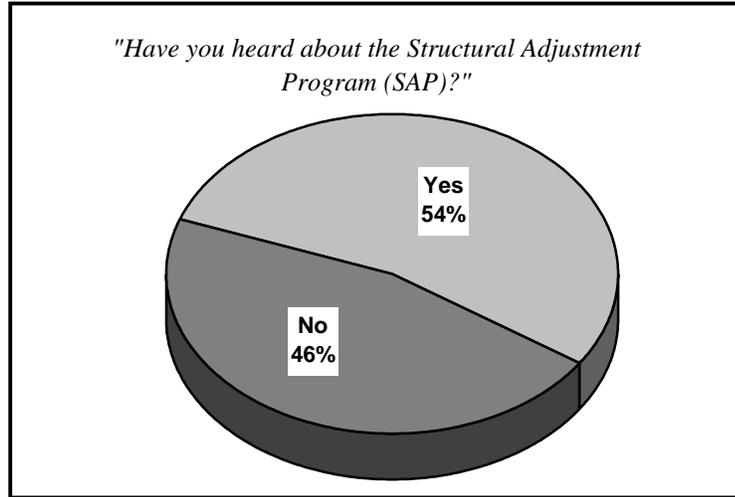
Thus Ugandans appear to be caught between state and market. Depending on the issue at hand, they oscillate between being either strongly pro-state, strongly pro-market, or somewhere in between. We might conclude from the above results that most Ugandans want the state to provide an infrastructure of human services, but not to be mainly responsible for employment, or that the citizenry is broadly accepting of income inequalities. But such conclusions would be premature, as subsequent results will show. The best we can say for the moment is that Ugandans are still trying to figure out where they stand in an era of expanding markets and shrinking states.

### **Attitudes to Economic Reform**

To cast further light on these topics, the survey asked a battery of questions about popular attitudes to stabilization and adjustment of the Ugandan economy.

First, had people heard about the government’s structural adjustment (SAP) program? When this question was asked without elaboration, only 28 percent answered affirmatively; when we added an illustrative prompt about “the freeing of prices, the sale of public companies, and job cuts in the civil service”, then 62 percent claimed to have heard of the SAP. Overall, 55 percent of respondents claimed some familiarity with the national economic reform program. This last figure puts Uganda in line with the average for four other African countries, where about half the population had heard about the SAP and the other half had not.

Even so, Ugandans display a relatively low level of popular awareness of the government’s economic reform program, which is held up as a model of one of the most far-reaching and sustained adjustment efforts on the African continent. Fewer people claim to comprehend something about “adjustment” (55 percent) than are aware of “democracy” (74 percent) in a context where the government and donors have emphasized the former.



**Figure 14. Knowledge of SAP**

Moreover, among those who know about the SAP, almost half (47 percent) are unsatisfied with it. Only 29 percent are satisfied. And 13 percent feel neutral.

Two interpretations are possible of these important results: from inside Uganda and without. From within the country, the findings suggest that a base of popular support for the government's economic strategy has yet to emerge. More people are unsatisfied with the effects of structural adjustment than are satisfied with it. The economic reform program appears to remain an elite initiative that has yet to be fully embraced a mass of intended beneficiaries.

A different interpretation is possible, however, from a perspective beyond Uganda's borders. The proportion who are satisfied with adjustment is higher in Uganda (29 percent) than in almost all other African countries where the same survey question has been asked: 19 percent in Malawi, 16 percent in Nigeria, and 4 percent in Zimbabwe. Indeed, the only African country that exceeds Uganda in the expressed a level of popular satisfaction with adjustment is Ghana (34 percent), which has sustained the longest-running adjustment program on the continent (from 1983 until recent reform reversals in 2000). From this perspective, one can discern the gradual emergence of an important (though minority) constituency for economic reform within the Ugandan population.

Who composes this reform constituency? The following groups are more likely to be satisfied with SAP: men rather than women (34 versus 23 percent); country dwellers rather than townspeople (urbanites are twice as likely to feel neutral about SAP); and persons with higher rather than lower incomes (35 versus 27 percent). The gender divide is consistent with the argument that structural adjustment programs throughout Africa have tended to have a greater negative impact on women. The urban-rural divide is consistent with the conventional view that townspeople "lose" under SAPs (e.g. through job retrenchment) whereas rural folk "win" (e.g. from the deregulation of agricultural producer prices).

To reliably tap popular sentiment toward economic reform, however, the adjustment package must be split into its component policies. We asked about four such policies: market pricing for consumer goods, user fees for educational services, the privatization of public corporations, and retrenchment in the civil service. To a greater or lesser extent, these measures have been introduced in Uganda since the late 1980s. Therefore we expected that people would have formed opinions on these policies and their effects, often on the basis of direct personal experience.

The survey showed that Ugandans support (or at least will tolerate) "getting the prices right". A large majority would prefer to "have goods available in the market, even if the prices are high" (69 percent) than "to have low prices, even if there are shortages of goods" (21 percent). Reflecting concerns noted earlier about the cost of education, a somewhat smaller majority (57 percent) support paying school fees, as long as the quality of education is improved. In accepting these kinds of price reforms, Ugandans fall

squarely within an emerging popular consensus in Africa in support of the removal of consumer subsidies and the market pricing of social services.

The survey also revealed, however, that Ugandans oppose the institutional reforms associated with structural adjustment. A majority feels that “all civil servants should keep their jobs, even if this is costly to the country” (54 percent), compared with a minority who hold the view that “the government cannot afford so many public employees and should lay some of them off” (35 percent). An even larger majority opposes privatization: 61 percent want the government to retain ownership of its factories and farms; only 30 percent want the government to sell these holdings. Again, these views in Uganda are consistent with an evident pan-African mass consensus against institutional reform within the public sector.

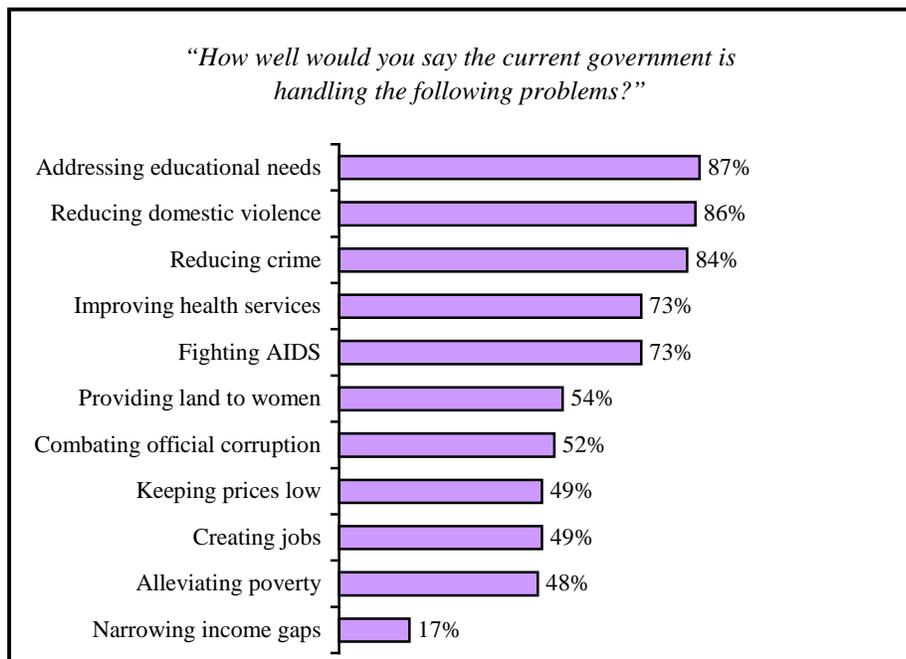
Finally, to summarize overall popular attitudes to economic reform, we note a striking difference between Uganda and other “adjusting” countries in Africa. Whereas Ghanaians, for example, express fatigue with the stringencies of adjustment, Ugandans seem much more inclined to persist with the NRM’s reform program. Fewer people think that “the costs of reforming the economy are too high; the government should therefore change its economic policies” (34 percent) than affirm that “in order for the economy to get better in the future, it is necessary for us to accept some hardships now” (47 percent). To be sure, this group is not a majority, but it is clearly larger than the 37 percent minority in Ghana who think that the temporary sacrifices of adjustment will turn out to be worthwhile.

From a national perspective, however, Ugandans do not express bottomless patience with economic reform. They are clearly much more indulgent of political reform. Whereas fewer than a half of all citizens want to give the market more time to work its supposed magic, more than seven out of ten are willing to give the “present system of government” more time to deal with “problems inherited from the past”. And, although men and women differ little on basic economic values and attitudes to reform, men are less patient than women in allowing time for reforms to work.

### **Evaluations of Government Performance**

To conclude, how do Ugandans assess the performance of Museveni’s NRM government at various socioeconomic tasks? They see it in a generally positive light: almost eight out of ten (78 percent) judge the government’s overall accomplishments as “good” (57 percent) or “very good” (21 percent). A positive performance rating of this order is more often associated with a new government during a post-election honeymoon (like the Obasanjo government’s 82 percent in Nigeria in February 2000) than with a government that has been in power for a decade and a half (like the Rawlings government’s 36 percent in Ghana in July 1999).

Nevertheless, public approval varies greatly according to specific policies. In contrast to the economic sector, the government’s performance is evaluated most positively in socio-political sectors. As Table 17 shows, the public strongly approves of the NRM’s performance in education (perhaps reflecting its policy of universal primary education) and crime control (perhaps reflecting the achievement of relative social peace since 1986). The public also commends the government for its performance in curbing domestic violence, improving health services and fighting AIDS though, as with education, approval does not imply that these problems, previously listed as high national priorities, have in any sense been fully resolved.



**Figure 15. Evaluations of Government Performance** (% saying “fairly well” or “very well”)

The government fares far less well in public opinion with regard to economic performance. Its macro-economic management is questioned by the majorities of people who do not approve of its handling of inflation, employment, and poverty. And the government is roundly condemned (with just 17 percent approving) for its performance in narrowing gaps between the rich and the poor. This exceptional protest can be taken as clear evidence of a popular backlash against the widening inequalities that seem to have accompanied economic adjustment.

## CONCLUSION

A survey conducted in June 2000 indicates that Ugandans say that they participate actively in politics but not in the benefits of economic growth. And at the same time as they value increased competition in the economy, Ugandans say they are open to a wider choice of political options than just the “movement” system. Thus reformers face a different set of challenges in the political and economic arenas.

Politically, the major challenge in Uganda’s democratization is the further expansion of competition. The present government has made noteworthy gains in giving voice to various mass actors. To its credit, the government has even allowed a modicum of political pluralism in selected sectors like the print press and women’s associations. But the regime has yet to extend a stake in the system to those citizens who do not accept the leading role of the National Resistance Movement and who seek an alternate choice of leaders. Indeed, public perceptions of limited political options appear to have led many Ugandans decided to stay away from the polls for Referendum 2000.

Economically, the major challenge in the transition to a market economy is to expand participation in the benefits of economic growth. To be sure, economic competition has been introduced into various markets, for example for agricultural products, export commodities and foreign exchange. Not only do too few people feel that they can take part in these new markets, but a popular view has arisen that those in political power are arrogating the best opportunities for themselves. It is a telling indictment that, in a

context where the NRM government is generally seen to have performed well, fewer than one in five Ugandans think it has done enough to close income gaps between the rich and the poor.

The survey results corroborate that President Museveni, and the “movement” are broadly popular. This popularity is a resource that can be deployed to redirect and reinvigorate reform. To achieve a market economy, Ugandans must participate more broadly in the benefits of economic growth. To achieve a democratic polity, citizens require an expanded range of political choices.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> World Bank, *African Development Indicators 2000*, <http://www.worldbank.org/data>.

<sup>ii</sup> The Afrobarometer is a joint venture of Michigan State University (MSU), the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA), and the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, Ghana). Thanks are due to Robert Mattes and Yul Derek Davids of IDASA who played major roles in the sample and questionnaire designs for this study.

<sup>iii</sup> At a 95 percent confidence level.

<sup>iv</sup> Because 30 returns from the northern region had to be discarded because data collection did not meet the project's quality standards, the sample was weighted by region to ensure that the north was represented in accordance with its true population size. All descriptive statistics in this report reflect this weighting.

<sup>v</sup> No relationships are reported unless they are statistically significant at the .001 level or better.

<sup>vi</sup> Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria and Zimbabwe.

<sup>vii</sup> To make this paper easy to read, we have omitted statistical coefficients throughout. Because this relationship is so strong and significant, however, we make an exception here: contingency coefficient = .766, sig. = .00000.

<sup>viii</sup> Because correlation does not equal causation, the effects may run in the opposite direction: i.e., associations may attract people who are more trusting to begin with.

<sup>ix</sup> Because the question on present satisfaction with the national economy was asked in a slightly different way in Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe (with a middle, neutral category), the figures reported here for these three countries include all persons who said they were *not* dissatisfied. The question wording was identical in Ghana and Uganda.

<sup>x</sup> Measured as self-assessed, monthly income of household head and spouse.

<sup>xi</sup> After the fact, we post-coded the first two problems mentioned.